

Uintah County Historical Society meeting 19 October 1985.  
Speakers are Chloe Vaughn, Esther Campbell, and Hugh Colton.

Chloe Vaughn: I am supposed to tell you about the Smelter Ranch and the coke ovens, but all that happened before I came into this country, so you'll have to bear with me because I had to get all the dates off our deed.

I lived at the Smelter Ranch for thirty-three years, buying it in 1937. The dates I am giving you are from the deeds of this land. Six hundred and forty acres went with the Smelter Ranch. The coke ovens were built in the 1700s or 1800s because I have no dates on them and don't know for sure. I figured from these other dates, and what I did know, and what my husband told me, that it surely must have been at that time.

In 1889 Mr. Edwards got a patent on 640 acres, then in 1908 he got a deed for 640 acres where the coke ovens were. He asked for a ditch which ran for miles back on Douglas Mountain. It was to have been adjudicated to him, but was never built. It was to have provided water for all of that. In 1913 he sold his land to Cattle Clay Springs. Later, in 1922, it was sold to the Pearce Land and Cattle Co. In 1924 it was sold to the Ute Land and Cattle Livestock, R. H. Winter was president.

In 1927, when I came to this county from Springfield, Illinois, I married Minford Vaughn, my old cowpuncher. At this time, 1927, it was sold to the Douglas Mountain Livestock, Bill Grounds was president, living in Craig, Colorado. He kept it long enough for his sons to tear everything down and take it out to the Sand Wash country and built a place to serve meals and to house people, a place for tourists to come to. That never happened. There was only the outside fences left when we bought the land. In 1942 a Mr. Haslop, who homestead down below Graystone, tore the buildings down around the boiler and built him a house and a dugout.

The mine was about seven miles above on Douglas Mountain. We also owned that land, but had nothing to do with the mine. It was a rich vein, but very small and it didn't pay to keep on running it. It was too expensive to haul the ore to Rock Springs, take it down to the smelter and smelt it out and take it out there. The roads were so bad at that time, especially through Irish Canyon. I suppose it was practically just a trail.

When we bought from H. B. Pleasant from Hayden, Colorado in 1937, he had bought it for taxes, and he also bought two sections of land, one above it and one below it. When we bought it, the whole thing to us was the "Old Smelter Ranch." There was lots of green ore that laid around. If you folks got over there to see it and seen that big black slab, there was an awful lot of green ore at that time that was laying around on that slab. But people kept coming in and each one took their little portion and there is nothing there now, they tell me. I didn't get to go over this summer.

The coke ovens have always been an interest. There was people, when we lived there, that came for miles to see that and there was very little water in the country and they came up to our place to get water. I imagine we would have at least two hundred people every summer come to our place to look at these coke ovens.

During the hard winter of 1949, just to tell you folks how big they were, because some people can't believe this, but it is very true, the snow was so bad and we didn't have barns enough

to put everything in it. Minford cut the poor cattle out and we took them down to the coke ovens and we put sixty head of cattle in those four coke ovens. We would feed down there. There was a nice spring down there, so they would stay pretty close to the coke ovens.

Just below the coke ovens was a cellar which I think might interest some you. For those who have been over there, several ask me about this little building--this little dugout. This was built by Hi Bernard and his wife then, Queen Ann Bassett. Queen Ann told me they used it for a smokehouse to smoke their meat and also to hang their meat. I'm sure it's still there. I don't know what kind of condition it's in, but I had that mentioned to me.

We built the eight-room home there in 1950. We had our own electricity, but later electricity came through there. We put all the improvements on it, that's on it now, and we built those two big reservoirs. We'd go out near Denver and get trout, the little tiny baby trouts, and plant [them] and ate many five-pound trout out of those reservoirs. This was interesting to those who went over there with me and we went into the house and you saw the house. We had picked up petrified wood all over the country while we herded our sheep and we built a fireplace from the floor to the ceiling of that petrified wood. It was a beautiful fireplace, in fact, it was the only thing that I hated to leave when I left there.

As we ran sheep and cattle both, now I'm just telling you this to show you as the years went by what happened, we kept buying land around there until we had ten thousand acres. We only gave \$2.50 an acre for that land. In 1960 we sold half of the ranch and moved to Grand Junction and we gave our daughter, Elmira Peterson, five thousand acres and the home ranch, the house and all. Because of school and their son having to go so far, they sold this to a man in Corpus Christi, Texas. He was a dentist. He bought it more or less for a tax write-off. Later, they decided to move and they sold this place, half of the ranch, now that's what we gave \$2 and \$2.50 an acre, they sold for \$150,000. I didn't realize that sagebrush was worth that much. Well, it was a wonderful ranch for Minford and I to enjoy for our thirty-three years. If I had to do it over, I'd do it again.

Esther Campbell: Well, I found some material at the last minute. It has a little bit about the bromide mine. We hadn't been able to find anything about the bromide mine. This is from an article in the paper that Henry Chaddy gave us when we made that trip over to Brown's Park in 1982 and we went on up to Minnie's Gap and had our barbecue and everything up there. He gave us each a book like this, but I forgot to look in it until Mildred Long reminded me there was a piece in here. So, I hunted it up.

Back in 1882 that well-educated and enterprising Welshman, Griff Edwards, had spent a great deal of time prospecting for minerals in the vicinity of Brown's Park. Well, that answers a question that I've been wondering about for a long time: what time they started that mine. That was in 1882. It was worked most of the time from then on. There was spells when they didn't do anything, but new owners would take over and go on with it.

His most important discovery was a sizable body of copper ore near the crest of Douglas Mountain not far from Zenobia Peak. Considering the distance and nature of transportation then available, hauling ore to an established smelter would have been very costly. To reduce it to metallic copper at or near its source seemed logical and a large series of beehive-type ovens were erected for the purpose at the eastern end of Douglas Mountain near the present town of Graystone, Colorado. A large series of bee-hive ovens, there are four, I don't know if there were ever more or not.

Edwards soon sold his interest in the mine in order to obtain title to the site they wanted for the smelters. The new owners entered a homestead filing on the land. It should be mentioned that this contained one of the best springs in the area. That is the spring that Cloy told about up there by their house.

Activities at the Bromide Mine and at the smelters reached its peak just prior to the turn of the century, 1900, at which time more than a hundred men were employed in the operation. So it was bigger then than it ever has been since. In this connection, it will be recalled that the chain of events which culminated in the killing of Valentine Hoy in March 1898 were set in motion by Johnson and Bennett butchering out Hoy's cattle and selling the meat to the boarding house at the mine.

John Bennett is buried on the Bassett place. They hung him on the place for aiding these three men who got away in 1898. It was Tracy escaped from the Salt Lake Prison and Johnson and David Lant. I don't know what Lant had done. I did know what Johnson had done. According to Queen Ann's story, there had been a dance in Brown's Park and it lasted until daylight and he'd gone right to bed and the cook wanted him to get up and eat breakfast and he didn't want to, so a young boy by the name of Willie Strang took a dipper of water and went in and threw it on him. This is Ann Bassett's story.

That angered him so that he reached for his gun and shot the boy. Then he had to leave the country. He joined up with Tracy and Lant and they tried to escape by means of Douglas Mountain. They went up Douglas Mountain to Powder Springs before they were caught. Bennett and Johnson had been butchering Hoy's cattle, so he was in on it, and as far as his character, I was never sure about it. It shows that in writing books, so many have different versions of things. One author will say one thing and another will tell it in a different way.

Well, I asked both Ann and Josie about this Bennett. Ann said he was a troublesome character that nobody could get along with, just always in trouble and doing things he shouldn't do, and he wasn't a good citizen. Josie said he was a very kind old man that was nice to everybody and they all liked him and so on and so forth. So, you see they both lived at the same time and knew the same man, but they had different ideas of him. But I guess he was more like Ann's way of looking at him.

Various names were given to this ranch: the Smelter Ranch, Douglas Place, Douglas Draw Place, Alta Vista, or Copper Canyon. Griff Edwards lived on what he called the Douglas Place, in the 1880s where he filed on 160 acres. That's the name that Ann gave to it, the Douglas Place, Douglas Draw Place. He came into the Park with his brother, Jack, about 1869. Griff also homesteaded 160 acres in the Conway Draw, just above the gates of Lodore. Glade and Sharon Ross now live in Conway Draw. They were there in 1897 when his will was probated.

Griff and Jack Edwards were supposed to be noble men from England. They were supposed to have a title as such. But they forfeited their title so they could stay out here in Brown's Park. They wouldn't go back to get it. Ann Bassett bought the Smelter Ranch from Edwards for \$1,500.

She made a proposition to Hi Bernard to come and run cattle with her at the Smelter Ranch in the summer and go to the Park in the winter. Ann and Hi were married on May 3, 1904. The land office records show Hi Bernard as filing on eight forties in the Smelter area on August 8, 1910, final date January 15, 1916. He purchased the Ada Jones, Mrs. Joe Jones, place and they were from Craig. It was north of his homestead, adjoining it.

In the fall of 1910, Hi went to Denver for the winter, but Ann decided to stay at the

Smelter Ranch. A fellow by the name of Yarberry and some others came in and spent the winter there, too. Hi came back in the spring of 1911, but it wasn't long until Ann and he were divorced. Ann stayed at the ranch and that was when they arrested her for butchering some Two Bar cows and rustling some White Land and Cattle Co. cattle.

The Grounds brothers bought the ranch and moved the house and the pipes to irrigate and poles, etc., to the Sand Wash in 1926. They lost it in 1929 to the Yampa Valley Bank. In 1932, H. B. Pleasant bought the 640 acres of the Smelter for taxes. He owned 640 acres above it and 640 acres down the draw north also. His wife passed away in 1937, so he leased it and eventually sold to Minford and Chloe Vaughn. In 1959, the Vaughns sold it to Kingsley and Mary Belle Kornopp and Bud Johnson from California. They gave the place to their daughter.

Here it tells about the coke oven, that they were not originally located on the property belonging to the Smelter Ranch. The water from the lower springs, by the little green house where Shorty Chambers lived, the water from the lower springs was used legally by the ranch six months of the year. The rest of the time it was to be used by the smelter. Doctor Tempestra started legal steps to get to use all of it soon after buying it. The Peterson, or Watson Valley, place on Douglas Mountain, west of Whiskey Springs, is also part of the ranch. This was written by Ellen Williams up at Dutch John. This tells about the bromide mine on Douglas:

1908 - title to J. W. Pearson and C. P. Pearson

1914 - Robert Pearson and Escalante Mining and Milling Company. Escalante put in the hands of a trustee and the company folded up.

1939 - Moffat County took the deed to the Par Value, Caldwell, and Yampa Mill sites. Moffat County still owns these mill sites, but the original Bromide mine site is still privately owned.

1935 - Rice R. Mines and Joe Mines bought the Bromide site. The heirs of Joe Mines still own it and also the Done mines, Eldwood Mines and Elta Mines.

[Continues reading from Williams' paper.]

The ore is high grade, better than 20 percent. There were hives, or coke ovens, at the mines. Sometimes it took weeks to smelter the ore. They would put layers of brick at the bottom so the ore could drip through, then a layer of charcoal, a layer of rock, and another of charcoal and rock until the smelter was filled. The charcoal was light and would burn for days as the ore dripped out. The charcoal was made from the big ponderosa pines all over the mountain. They were hauled by wagon and team to the site of the smelter. Much of the ore was hauled to Rock Springs by wagon and team and shipped by rail from there.

Then after they made the coke ovens, they brought some kind of a rock down that looked like, we had a sample of it, but it disappeared, it looked like frozen sea water, light green. We had a few pieces of it. They had to bring that from Rock Springs to make the ore separate, to bring the copper out. Then they'd haul the copper to Rock Springs in these big ore wagons and bring this green stuff back again. Light green rock. It was quite expensive. [She shows pictures.]

Hugh Colton [about mines]: I was asked to say something about the mining interest of my father, whose name was Sterling B. Colton. I am very pleased to do this. I hope I can give something that will be of interest to you, although I told Mrs. Young and LaVon Wall, when they asked me to talk about my father's mining interest, that it was pretty much hearsay.

I was the last of nine children that my father and mother reared and I think I was pure

accident. You girls shouldn't take anything for granted because my mother was forty-eight years old when I was born, nine years between me and the next sister older. She cried for three days after I was born because I wasn't a girl. She had six brothers before I was born and one living sister and she wanted another little sister, so it was a sad event for her when I showed up. My mother didn't know what was wrong with her when I began. She took one of my brothers and a team and a buggy and went to Provo to find out from her old family doctor that she was expecting. You would think with the experiences she'd had, she should have known what was happening.

To talk about the mining interest, how many of you have had a father who was a little off about minerals? None of you.

(Side one of the tape ends. When side two begins, Colton is the middle of a sentence.)

Hugh Colton: ...families. They weren't all right at the smelter, but there were, I think I counted twenty old log cabins scattered around in this area, to me one of the most beautiful spots in the High Uintas. This little Anderson Creek, named Anderson Creek because of pioneers here with loads of descendants, had his first sawmill on this creek. They named it Anderson Creek after him, and it is a beautiful area. It is a little difficult to get into, but I can get in and if I can get in, any of you should be able to get in. It's really worth going up to see.

The old smelter building is caved in. The office is there and the excavation rock work they did is wonderful to look at. I hope that this hit and miss talk gives you some idea of what happened up there.

The facts are: as to the date of location, 1882 the mill, the smelter in 1886 is correct. The property, after the mining operation failed and they moved out, was gone to the county for tax sale and purchased by three or four different people. The mine where it was, the mountain is still there and enough remains of the old excavation to give you a clear picture of what a great operation this really was, where under the hardships they had, transportation facility was limited to horses and wagons, and not too much know-how about mining or smelting ore.

It's interesting to look at and I hope you all have the opportunity to go up there and look at it. My father did make money in locating a claim at Eureka. He did have Gilsonite mines, he sold at least two claims out there he had located. He made money at the Dyer mine by hauling the ore out. Then there were many sad experiences he had where he lost money in his desire to be a successful mining man.

My hope is that I have been able to call to your attention the hardships that the early pioneers had and to the courage and industry and hard work that they put into whatever it took to develop the community we now live in. I am sorry I am not better informed, like Esther and Mrs. Vaughn, but I am interested in the basic traits of character that people had in building the community we have here today. I want to commend all of you people for your interest in the historical back ground of our area.

Question: Hugh, was that old excavation or an underground operation up there?

Hugh: No, it was a shaft.

Man: And for a while they got sixty percent ore out of the natural body?

Hugh: Yes, hauled it down the hill to the smelter, to where they had water, and then marketed it. Ernest Untermann described the kind of ore it was and it was a big body called Glory Discovery, or something of that kind. But it was a very rich body of ore formed by hot water to begin with. It was just a big room full, so to speak, but when they mined that out, nothing was left.

Women: How many years did it function, did they actually run it. Do you know?

Hugh: Yes. They started the smelter in 1886 and the last ore was taken out in 1899.